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Republican Caucus Vice Chair

Committees:
Economic Development,
Trade and Agriculture - *Assistant ranking*
Health Care
Transportation - *Assistant ranking*

2006 Report to the Voters - 14th District

Dear friends,

We adjourned the 2006 legislative session March 8, one day earlier than its scheduled 60 days. Although the session was intense, we focused on an agenda given to us last fall by the citizens of our state called the "Commitment to Washington."

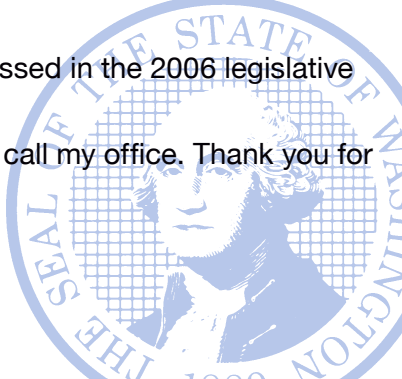
Under that agenda, we worked to provide more help for farmers, assistance for low-income families struggling with high energy bills, and tougher laws against sex offenders. We eliminated the day-use fee in our state parks, and came to an agreement on unemployment insurance.

I personally worked to increase job opportunities in our local communities and throughout the state, help small businesses become more viable, and provide more options for access to health care.

This newsletter touches on many important issues we addressed in the 2006 legislative session.

Should you have questions or comments, please feel free to call my office. Thank you for the honor of allowing me to serve as your state representative.

Mary Skinner
Rep. Mary Skinner



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Page, Intern program offers legislative
experience, education for young people

Many thanks to Andre' Arcand and Guy Hartwig, both eight-grade students at Discovery Lab School in Yakima who served as legislative pages in my Olympia office for one week, and to David Sattgast from Shelton, Washington, who served as an honorary page in the Legislature.

These young people had the unique opportunity to view the legislative process firsthand. They participated in ceremonial tasks such as presenting flags and also helped in operational chores like delivering messages and documents to legislators in their offices, committee meetings and the House chamber. Pages are between the ages of 14 and 17 and spend two hours each day in a classroom setting learning about the Legislature.

Also, my thanks go out to Caitlin Hasenauer who served as my legislative intern during the session. College-age interns who serve in the Legislature typically do research, bill tracking, constituent correspondence, and agency casework. They have the opportunity to attend committee hearings and other meetings, and interact with staff and legislators.

For more information about how to become involved in the page program or the intern program, visit: <http://www1.leg.wa.gov/house/pageinternprogram> or call my office at (360) 786-7810.



Andre' Arcand



Guy Hartwig



David Sattgast



Caitlin Hasenaur

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Rep. Mary Skinner met with Dr. Lutz Harfst from Animal Medical Service, Yakima, who came to the state Capitol for Small Business Day.

BUDGET and TAXES

I had hoped that we could have put money away in a protected rainy day account from the \$1.6 billion revenue surplus and also catch up our payments to Plan 1 pensions for teachers and state employees. Unfortunately, Republicans were shut out of supplemental operating budget negotiations by the majority party which created a plan to spend \$1.3 billion of the surplus, leaving only \$216 million in savings. With a 17.7 percent boost in spending, adding 816 employees to the state payroll, it is the largest spending increase in the history of the state.

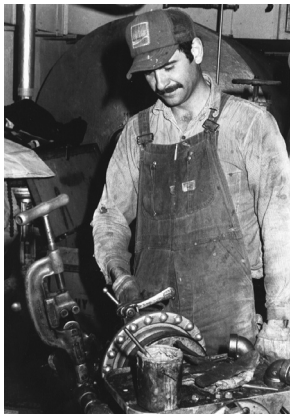
On **state pensions**, the Legislature resumed payments to the Plan 1 pension systems for the first time in four years, but voted to phase in the Fiscal Year 2007 payment over three years and not make up for payments suspended during the previous three years. The excuse for this was that local governments would have had to do the same, and smaller counties, cities and school districts would have been in a bind. So they would -- but the result will be much larger pension funding costs for all in future years.

The operating budget did include \$7 million to upgrade **baseball stadiums** in several cities, including Yakima. However, it also included taxpayer money for sex-change operations under the state's Medicaid program.

For these and many other reasons, I was not able to support the supplemental budget.

JOBS & ECONOMY

As assistant ranking member of the House Economic Development, Agriculture and Trade Committee, one of my top goals is to help small businesses succeed and create new jobs. Two years ago, the Legislature adopted my bill that created a **small business incubator program** to assist start-up companies. Last November, one of the first incubators opened in Yakima.



This year, I sought to expand that program through House Bill 1815. The measure was designed to provide operational support for incubators. Although it passed the House, the bill died in the Senate.

Fortunately, another measure I co-sponsored to **help small businesses** passed and was signed into law. House Bill 2726 puts the Washington Manufacturing Services into state law. WMS is a not-for-profit organization that helps smaller manufacturers increase their competitiveness. It works with companies of 100 or fewer employees to help them stay successful and profitable.

We also tried to eliminate the state's **death tax** which imposes an unnecessary and unfair penalty on family-owned businesses when they are passed down from one generation to the next. Unfortunately, the majority party rejected our motion to consider legislation that would repeal this tax.

A personal note from Rep. Skinner

Thank you for your kind cards, notes and well wishes during my recent surgery. The surgery went well and I am home recovering. As you may have read, I am undergoing treatment for colon cancer, including radiation and chemotherapy. It is the greatest challenge of my life. Thousands of Washingtonians are cancer survivors. They have traveled this same journey and have returned to continue the activities they enjoy. I fully intend to do the same. I also hope this to be a learning experience for me and for those I serve. Early detection is the best way to protect your health. Please make sure you have regular check-ups and talk to your doctor for more information.

AGRICULTURE

The Legislature approved several important bills to help our local farmers. Most notable was a landmark Columbia River **water agreement** that sets the stage for a 10-year, \$200 million bond package that would increase water storage in the Columbia River basin. It's taken decades to reach the deal, with water users seeking more water for communities, agriculture and commerce, and environmentalists fighting for sufficient water for threatened fish runs.



Lawmakers also made Washington only the second state in the nation with **biofuel** and biodiesel mandates, to be implemented by December 2008. The mandates are set to ensure a market for farmers who grow the feedstock that will be used for biofuels.

The Legislature also gave farmers a **tax break on "red dyed fuel."** That's the non-highway diesel fuel used in farm vehicles. Under HB 2424, farmers and ranchers won't have to pay the sales tax on diesel or aviation fuel used for farm applications. Some estimated the move could save the average farmer about \$1,500 a year.

Finally, business and labor groups came together on permanent **unemployment insurance** reforms. The proposal gives seasonal workers full benefits while employers pay less taxes. It makes permanent the formula in which unemployment benefits are calculated on six months of employment instead of 12 months.

TRANSPORTATION

We approved a \$121.6 million supplemental transportation budget that includes \$5.3 million for slope stabilization on **Snoqualmie Pass**. As a member of the House Transportation Committee, I also voted to move up design work on the I-90/Snoqualmie Pass widening project, which was originally listed to begin in 2011.

The Legislature also approved an amendment to the transportation budget I offered with Rep. Jim Clements' help which added \$2.5 million for **downtown Yakima sidewalks and safety improvements**.

HEALTH CARE

One of the 11 points in our Commitment to Washington was "Give health care back to patients." House Bill 1383 provides tax-free **health savings accounts** for public employees.



As a member of the House Health Care Committee, I also fought for meaningful **small business health care reform** that would provide health insurance options so that employers could purchase affordable health plans for their employees. Senate Republicans successfully amended a Democrat measure, HB 2572, with components to allow for flexible, low-cost and mandate-free health plan offerings, and expanded use of health savings accounts. Unfortunately, the House Democrat majority stripped those amendments from the bill, replacing them with provisions that provide government-subsidized health care for about 2,000 people – a fraction of the state's 600,000 uninsured.

OTHER LEGISLATION

- **Sex offenders:** We pushed hard for sex offender legislation that would meet the level of "Jessica's Law" in Florida. Although we didn't get there, we were able to convince the majority party to toughen the bills we considered. As a result, sex offenders who molest children and vulnerable adults will go to prison for 25 years.
- **Low-income energy assistance:** This legislation provides \$7.6 million in low-income energy assistance to help reduce the burden of high energy costs for families. It was part of the Commitment to Washington, "Help needy families by reducing energy costs."
- **Park day-use fee elimination:** After watching attendance decline at state parks by nearly 20 percent since a \$5 day-use parking fee was enacted three years ago, the Legislature repealed the charge.

Alex and Virginia Santillanes from Social Justice Respect Life, office for the Yakima Diocese, came to Olympia seeking support for low-income housing. The Legislature provided \$21 million for safe, affordable housing to low-income residents.

